

I CLAIM:

1. A public-access e-commerce service portal providing a user access to an internet, said portal comprising:

5 a computer including a display screen, a card reader adapted to read financial account information from a card, an input device adapted to provide alphanumeric and screen-coordinate selected by the user, a drive unit adapted to read data from and write data to a removable data storage medium, and a printer unit, said computer being programmed to permit a user to selectively operate the units after said user enters a valid log-on ID, to establish a log-on ID for a new user after receiving answers manually input to the computer by the new user in response to predetermined demographic questions, and programmed to test the validity of financial account information, PIN number and log-on ID entries made by users;

a video camera connected to the computer, said computer being programmed to use said video camera to provide video-conference service to the user;

15 a telecommunications link adapted to connect the computer to an e-commerce intranet providing free services to the user, said free services including information resources and free access to selected e-commerce intranet sites and live contact with an intranet agent and live contact with an intranet agent at an e-commerce service facility.

20 2. The portal of claim 1 further comprising a second telecommunications link, said second link being a switched link, said computer being further programmed to initiate a call back over the switched link when a service selected by the user requires a fee to be paid by the user.

3. The portal of claim 1 further comprising a paid- service indicator adjacent said card reader, said indicator connected to the computer to indicate when the computer is providing a paid service that has elapsed-time charges.

4. The portal of claim 1 wherein the computer is programmed to provide an idle-time display including full motion video entertainment clips, said computer re-initiating the idle-time display after a user enters a valid log-on ID after the user selects a free service and then does not make a further selection within a predetermined time period.

5. The portal of claim 1 further comprising an office service unit, said computer being programmed to provide word processing services.

6. The portal of claim 1 further comprising a laptop service unit including electric power and data connectors for use by a laptop computer.

7. The portal of claim 1 further comprising multiple carrels, said carrels being connected to a shared first link and adapted to respond to a respective separate second call-back telecommunications link to transfer user ID and PIN number information between the e-commerce service facility and the user.

8. The portal of claim 1, further comprising means for substituting a log-on display for an idle-time display for a limited period of time.

9. The portal of claim 1 further comprising means for limiting use of a free audio-visual service within a predetermined period of time.

10. The portal of claim 1 further comprising demo means for selectably implementing free demo displays including one of said full motion video entertainment clips, said demo displays being more extensive than said clip, and means for limiting the frequency of implementing said free demo.

11. The portal of claim 1 further comprising a private booth adapted to enclose a user and said computer.

12. A public-access e-commerce service network, said network comprising:

a plurality of e-commerce portals, each portal having a computer adapted to read
5 financial account information from a card, respond to alphanumeric and screen-coordinate
information selected by the user, read data from and write data to a removable data storage
medium, selectively print information for the user, and provide video-conference service to a
user aid computer being programmed to permit a user to selectively operate the units after
said user enters a valid log-on ID, programmed to establish a log-on ID for a new user after
10 receiving answers manually input to the computer by the new user in response to
predetermined demographic questions, and programmed to test the validity of financial
account information, PIN number and log-on ID entries made by users; and

a respective telecommunications link adapted to connect each of the computers to an
e-commerce intranet, said intranet providing free services to the user, said free services
15 including information resources sponsored by members of the intranet, and user access to
selected e-commerce intranet sites, and to an e-commerce service facility.

13. The network of claim 12 wherein said intranet service facility provides pre-paid
accounts enabling users to obtain paid intranet services.

14. The network of claim 13 wherein said intranet service facility provides pre-paid
20 cards enabling users to obtain paid intranet services.

15. The network of claim 12 wherein said intranet service facility further comprises
means for providing paid e-commerce support services.

16. A method of providing public access to e-commerce activities comprising the steps of:

providing a log-on ID to a user upon receiving answers from the user to predetermined questions;

5 providing selectable access to a plurality of paid and free services after validating a user ID entered by a user, said free services including access to selected e-commerce intranet sites;

providing access to each paid service selected by a user after validating a respective PIN number entered by the user.

10 17. The method of claim 16 wherein the portal provides a plurality of free services to the user using a first link, and provides the log -on ID to the user and receives the log on ID and PIN number from the user by using a separate, switched second communications link.